

Tourist's Guide to Innsmouth

General Location

"You *could* take the old bus, I suppose," he said with a certain hesitation, "but it ain't much thought of hereabouts. It goes through Innsmouth--you may have heard about that--and so the people don't like it."

In their generally admirable annotated edition of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" (Necronomicon Press, 1994), S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz cite Lovecraft's statements that the fictional town of Innsmouth is inspired by the atmospheric, decaying town of Newburyport, Mass. But, as they also point out, Innsmouth itself is distinguished from Newburyport in the story, and is said to be located somewhere on the route from Newburyport to Arkham.

The exact location is a matter of some doubt. Joshi and Schultz point out that Innsmouth also shares some parallels with the real town of Gloucester, which is not mentioned in the story, and they imply that Lovecraft may have intended Innsmouth to be situated where Gloucester is. However, the evidence in the story convinces me that Innsmouth could not be located on the site of Gloucester. Consider:

The narrator sets out from Newburyport in Joe Sargent's bus, which proceeds south along the coast. The road splits from the main highway to Rowley and Ipswich, and veers toward the beach instead. The narrator sees Plum Island on the left, but eventually they pass the southern tip of Plum Island and he sees the open expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. Then the road begins to climb, and at the next crest, the valley of the Manuxet, with Innsmouth at its mouth, lies spread before them. Manuxet "joins the sea just north of the long line of cliffs that culminate in Kingsport Head and veer off toward Cape Ann" (315-316 in the corrected Arkham printing of *The Dunwich Horror and Others*). Kingsport is another of Lovecraft's creations, but Cape Ann is real enough, and it happens that Gloucester is well around the corner beyond Cape Ann. Joe Sargent's bus simply hasn't driven that far.

There are other indications of a location too far north to be Gloucester. The Ipswich road is an extension of Eliot St, which proceeds southwest from Town Square. Thus, when the narrator gazes west from his hotel room, planning his escape, he sees the Ipswich road to his left (347). The narrator also observes that the abandoned railway line to Rowley stretches off to the northwest (354).

So Innsmouth is supposed to be further south than Plum island, but not so far south as Cape Ann; also roughly southeast of Rowley and roughly northeast of Ipswich. Such a place would be perhaps near the mouth of the Ipswich river; one wonders if that river could be the inspiration for the Manuxet.

It is also quite possible that Lovecraft had no precise location in mind for Innsmouth, but the clues mentioned above seem to at least indicate the correct stretch of coast.

Specific Layout

Warning me that many of the street signs were down, the youth drew for my benefit a rough but ample and painstaking sketch map of the town's salient features... Thus I began my systematic though half-bewildered tour of Innsmouth's narrow, shadow-blighted ways.

What do we know about the specific layout of streets and buildings in Innsmouth? Joshi and Schultz mention a map by Lovecraft on the back of p. 14 of his handwritten manuscript, but state that it "was executed hastily in pencil and thus has been found unsuitable for reproduction." They also mention Lovecraft's statement that he made a complete chart of Innsmouth while writing the story; it is not clear to me whether this is a reference to the map that was found in the manuscript, or some other more complete map. "Perhaps," they conclude, "it was made in order that the narrator's exit from Innsmouth would be clear in Lovecraft's mind--although, to be frank, it is scarcely clear to the reader, since no reader can properly visualise the actual relation of streets in the decaying town."

In my opinion, the layout is not as obscure or confusing as they suggest. I have not had access to Lovecraft's sketch, but the internal evidence of the story gives us a pretty good idea of the location of the various streets and landmarks. My own map is based on such clues in the story itself. Some details are approximate or speculative, but most of the information can be justified by simply following the narrator's progress through the town and the observations he makes.

When he first glimpses Innsmouth from the north, the narrator notes the steeples and belfries of some of the major buildings, and the tendency of increased decay toward the waterfront. He also notes the stone breakwater, ruined lighthouse, and tongue of sand with cabins, dories, and lobster pots. The orientation of the breakwater is not described, except that "the only deep water seemed to be where the river poured out past the belfried structure and turned southward to join the ocean at the breakwater's end" (316). I first read this to mean that the river turns south at the end of the breakwater. However, the belfried structure is the Marsh refinery, which is located on the lower part of the river, near the river's mouth. The implication is therefore actually that the water flows past the refinery and shortly thereafter is guided southward by the breakwater.

As they proceed into town, they reach an "open concourse or radial point" (318) which we later find out is called New Church Green. The Order of Dagon Hall is located at the right-hand (that is, west) junction. Across the street from it is a church, through whose basement door the narrator glimpses the "robed, shambling form" that makes such a horrific impression. We later learn that this is the Congregational Church. A third, Baptist church in the Green is also mentioned later (350).

Presently the bus passes over a bridge, and the narrator sees two sets of falls upstream and one downstream. Then they roll into a "semicircular square" across the river; we later find out this is called Town Square. The hotel of ill-repute, Gillman House, is located on the right (west) side (319). The narrator lists the buildings in the square in this order: First National grocery, restaurant, drug store, wholesale fish-dealer's, and Marsh Refinery Company office. The latter is specified as being at the easternmost extremity of the square. Since the narrator is standing at Gilman House, on the west side of the square, it seems likely that he is listing the buildings in order from west to east. The grocery boy tells him that the street he came in on is Federal (320).

The narrator crosses the bridge back to the northern side of the river and proceeds toward the lower falls, passing the Marsh refinery and noting the "open confluence of streets" which form the Old Square. He crosses back to the south on Main St. bridge, so we know Main St. is another north /south running street, located further east than Federal. He then runs into two more north/south streets with bridges: Fish St. and Water St., in that order. The narrator, who evidently enjoys crossing the river on dilapidated bridges as frequently as possible, crosses to the north again, this time on the Water St. bridge (324).

After traversing some suspiciously atmospheric terrain, the narrator finds himself admiring two old churches at the corner of Main and Church Streets. We already know that Main is north/south, so Church probably runs east/west. Since his "next logical goal" is New Church Green, Church St. evidently connects with the Green when you follow it west. Overcome by a desire to avoid "robed, shambling" churchgoers, the narrator keeps north on Main to Martin, and proceeds west, crossing Federal St. well north of the Green (325).

Now he enters the stately neighborhood of northern Broad, Washington, Lafayette, and Adams Streets (324). I take it that he is listing the streets in order from east to west, and all subsequent references to these streets confirm this order. So by now, you see, we have established most of the north/south running streets in Innsmouth, as well as the relative positions of New Church Green and the east/west streets Church and Martin.

In Washington Street he finds the mansions of the great families of the town; the Marsh estate extends through to Lafayette St., thus confirming that Lafayette is one street over (325-326). He proceeds south on Washington to the river, and on reaching it, notes the railway station and covered railway bridge upstream. After crossing the Washington Street bridge, he turns on Paine St. toward Town Square. Paine St. is evidently either an east/west street or one of the diagonal streets that extends Southwest from Town Square. However, I think it is more likely an east/west street because he only mentions reaching the south bank, and does not mention proceeding any further south before he turns on Paine. At some point along Paine St, between Washington and Town Square, he sees the fire station on the left, with the crazed Zadok Allen hanging out on a bench in front (326).

Seized by some perverse imp of dark, hidden sources, the narrator proceeds to a "dingy variety store just off the square in Eliot Street," there to procure some bootleg liquor. At this point it is not yet clear which way Eliot Street runs (326).

The narrator entices old Zadok to follow him along Waite Street, which evidently runs east or south-east toward the waterfront. They turn on Water Street, with a goal of going a few squares south to get beyond the view of the fishermen on the distant breakwater. They settle down on some rocks near a wharf, just south of a deserted warehouse that blocks the breakwater from view (328).

Later, "seeking a route I had not traversed before, I chose Marsh Street instead of State for my return to Town Square." It is not completely clear whether this means that the narrator had used State previously, and thus prefers Marsh now; or whether (as I think more likely), he had not used either street previously and now picked Marsh St. more or less at random. At any rate, both streets are evidently useful for getting back to the square from the southeast, so I have drawn them as southeast diagonals from Town Square. Their exact placement on the map is speculative, but reasonable. Before reaching the square, he passes Fall St., which I think we can reasonably infer is a north/south street with a bridge crossing the river near the lower falls (341).

Back in Town Square, our unlucky narrator is coerced into staying over at Gillman House, where he checks into fourth-story (346) rear room with a westward view (342). The room overlooks a courtyard that is entirely surrounded by buildings (it does not let directly out into a street). When he makes his escape from the room later, he proceeds through the connecting rooms to the north, hoping to reach the roofs of buildings on Paine St; thus, Paine St. must hit Town Square north of Gilman House. This reinforces the impression that Paine is an east/west street running directly along the south bank of the river.

The nearest streets that he contemplates reaching are Paine, Washington, or Bates. Paine is to the north, and Washington to the west; the reasonable inference that Bates is to the south is confirmed later. He prefers to avoid Paine because he doesn't want to risk being seen from the fire-station. Since we have now found out that Washington is the closest street to the west, and we already know that the fire-station is between Washington and Town Square on Paine, the location of the fire station is pinned down fairly precisely. However, we don't actually know if it is on the north or south side of Paine St. (347).

He climbs down to an adjoining building that abuts Paine St. to the north, the courtyard to the south, and Washington St. to the west (349-351). He heads south on Washington, crosses Bates street, and continues to where Washington intersects both an east/west street called South and Eliot St., which is revealed to be a diagonal street running southwest. Looking east on South St, he can see clear to the sea (351).

On perceiving that the southern exit on Federal toward Arkham is likely to be blocked, he decides to make for the abandoned train line to Rowley. He proceeds there

indirectly, in order to avoid recrossing the conspicuous intersection of Washington, South, and Eliot. First he continues south on Washington, then turns west on a cross-street called Babson, north on Lafayette, west on Bates, north on Adams, and left on Bank Street. This sequence confirms that the great residential streets from the north side of the river all continue here on the south side, and in the same order that they were listed originally. He also mentions that Eliot has another three-way intersection, this one with Lafayette and Babson, a fact which gives us a trajectory of sorts for Eliot St. (354-356).

Bank street apparently follows the south side of the river, like Paine St. The two streets could be the same, with Bank being the name of the westernmost portion, or they could parallel, with Bank the closer of the two to the river (354, 356). He follows Bank some considerable distance to the railway station. My map is not to scale at this point; to keep the railway station from falling off the edge, I have drawn it not far west of Adams.

The tracks emerge from the far (west) side of the station, follow the river for some distance, and then cross over. The narrator gets to cross another rickety bridge. On the north side, he crosses River St., which from the name presumably follows the north bank of the river closely (357).

Proceeding along the old tracks, he approaches a point where the Rowley road crosses over and pursues a course further to the west (359). Here he witnesses the parade of "croaking, baying entities of unknown source" and faints dead away. The next day he continues on to Rowley.

A note about the Rowley road: I have drawn it as starting from the Old Square, but only because, as the oldest center in town, it seems a plausible starting-point. All we really know about this road is that it proceeds generally to the northwest after leaving town, and eventually crosses the abandoned train line.

By drawing in these elements as the narrator encountered them, we have created a coherent map of Innsmouth. Most of the main streets and their relationships are clear. A few, such as Paine, State, and Marsh, are known only approximately, from their relationship to Town Square; and the Rowley road is known barely at all, since we are not actually told where it starts from in town. But surely we have enough information here to picture the progress of the story and the course of the narrator's escape. This geographic detail adds greatly to the richness of the narrative and the sense it conveys of Innsmouth as a real place, rooted firmly in New England history but harboring the most unholy secrets of a vast, indifferent cosmos.